

*PROPOSED SEIZURE OF PRINCE  
IMPERIAL. III*

Shortly after the return of Napoleon from Elba, believing it to be impossible to make the Emperor of Austria consent to his wife's rejoining him (and Maria Louisa had no inclination to a renewal of conjugal intercourse), Napoleon had not been many days in Paris when he concocted a plan for carrying off from Vienna both his wife and his son.<sup>1</sup> In this project force was no less necessary than stratagem. A number of French of both sexes much devoted to the Emperor, who had given them rank and fortune, had accompanied Maria Louisa in 1814 from Paris to Blois and thence to Vienna. A correspondence was opened with these persons, who embarked heart and soul in the plot; they forged passports, procured relays of horses, and altogether arranged matters so well that but for a single individual — one who revealed the whole project a few days previously to that fixed upon for carrying it

the name of his son. This would have placed the Allies in an awkward situation, but it would have been disregarded. Napoleon seems to have sometimes thought of taking the step, but finally dismissed the idea (Lung's *Lucien*, tome iii. p. 264).

<sup>1</sup> Meneval, who as the secretary of Maria Louisa ought to have been well acquainted with the facts, says (tome ii. p. 264) that before the return from Elba there had been an attempt to carry off the Prince Imperial. He attributes this plot to Fouché, the arch-fiend of the Imperialists, but says that want of money, unforeseen difficulties (probably the feelings of the Empress), and the return from Elba, made the plan fail. This had put the Austrians on the alert, and "on the 19th of March the Empress, arriving from Vienna, went to the apartment of her son and communicated to Madame de Montesquiou (the *gouvernante*) the wish expressed by the Emperor of Austria. She desired her to be ready to start at eight o'clock in the evening, without letting her know the reasons which made this hurried departure necessary. At the hour named she got into a carriage with Madame de Montesquiou and her son and took them to the Imperial Palace, where she left them." There is something revolting in the Empress making herself the instrument to prevent her son obtaining the brilliant inheritance which might have been his. However little she might have considered herself bound to her parvenu husband in his days of misfortune, still her son might have had enough claims on her to make her at least remain passive. The presence of his mother perhaps prevented the poor little Prince from trying to resist as, with a strange presentiment, he did when forced to take the fatal step of leaving Paris for Blois in 1814. On the 20th March, the same day on which Napoleon entered the Tuileries, Madame de Montesquiou was compelled to resign her charge, and the separation of the Prince from his French attendants was completed. This last measure was taken from the belief that the Comte Anatole de Montesquiou, who had left Paris on the 20th of March, nominally to communicate with the Empress, was really intrusted with a plan for carrying off the Prince. The Allies professed to be aghast at the wickedness of Napoleon. It had never occurred to Napoleon to make political capital out of the capture of the wife and child of a foe. The lesson here taught by the Austrians was not forgotten by Louis Philippe when he seized the Duchesse de Berri in 1832.